

Bürger (Gottfried August) [Single Poems.]

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LEONORA:

A POEM,

FROM THE GERMAN

OF

MR. BÜRGER.

London:

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1796.



INTRODUCTION.

INGENIOUS and eccentric as is the petite Poem of LEONORA, by Mr. Bürger, no less than three translations having been already ushered to Public Notice, it may, perhaps, favour strong of presumption to attempt a fourth.—The Author's apology (like that of many other apologists) must be to declare, he had originally no other intention than to amuse himself—flattered, however, by the opinion of friends who had perused the manuscript, all-powerful vanity, so strongly predominant in each susceptible bosom, now prompts him to appear (a first offence) in print.

The attempt is daring, after such brilliant success has already crowned the efforts of Mr. Spencer's and Mr. Pye's genius—to the former, every tribute of applause has been already paid; nor does it require further eulogium.—Of the latter, all the author knows is from report, not being fortunate enough to have seen his production. To Mr. Stanley indeed, (whose translation is the only one he had seen previous to the completion of his own) he is indebted for the explication of some, the most difficult passages in this work—his knowledge of the original being too superficial without such assistance.—Candour bids him say thus much; but at the same time, bids him presume to assert, if he has taken the liberty to borrow *Mr. Bürger's meaning*, he has not piratically adopted the *language* of him



who ventured to stand forth a first translator.

However deficient may be *his* knowledge of the language *allemande*, he feels an inclination to be persuaded that, in some measure, the *spirit* of the original has been preserved, if not strictly the *letter*—or at least some portion of its eccentricity, which indisputably is its principal beauty.

Those repetitions (to which with justice may be applied the *decies repetita placebit* of Horace) are conspicuously in that style of writing, and give no small *eclat* to the whole composition—doubtless the author here piqued himself on having stepped beyond the boundaries of sober sense, and soared with true poetic enthusiasm into such exclamations as well befit the character he portrays.

A Taste for the terrible, most of us have imbibed in the nursery—how few are proof against the grisly charms of a ghost—a dæmon or an apparition! These Ideal phantoms, Mr. Bürger seems to have personified with no inconsiderable degree of success.—This introduction however, not being intended as a preface to the poem, but only as the translator's apology, he thus cuts short all further comment, indulging the fond hope that, though last on the list of LEONORA'S devotees, he may have the gratification to find he is not the least.



LEONORA.

FAIR Leonora's slumbers o'er,
Foreboding ills, she left her bed;
"William," she cry'd, "I view no more,
"I dreamt he was untrue, or dead."
At Prague's fam'd Battle William fought,
Where vict'ry gallant Fred'rick taught;
But if that fate-fraught day he fell,
Or 'scap'd the conflict, none could tell.

Prussia's conquest-glutted King,
And Hungary's ill-fated Queen,
Tir'd of Contention ling'ring,
By treaty now had clos'd the scene.
As joyous home, the armies steer'd,
With laugh and song their march they cheer'd;
The drum's loud notes, the trumpet's bray,
And cymbal's crash beguil'd the way.

With garlands crown'd, or oaken bough,
As gay with hope they march'd along;
Each neighb'ring town, and hamlet too,
Pour'd forth to meet them, old and young.
Thank God! the lisping infants said,
Sires seiz'd their crutch, and left their bed,
Whilst many a youth, and many a maid,
With heart-felt glee, their welcomes paid.



But ah! poor Leonora's fate
Forbad the greeting kifs to share,
Of William---her long-chosen mate,
No voice could tell, or tidings bear :
Frantic with grief, ſhe rav'd aloud,
Amidſt the ſympathiſing crowd ;
'Till ſunk at length in deep deſpair,
Swooning and ſenſeleſs fell the Fair.

Her Mother caught her in her arms,
And tenderly eſſay'd to ſooth ;
“ In God's name ceaſe theſe wild alarms,
“ Nor longer mourn the treach'rous youth.
“ Mother, ſhe cry'd, my fate is hard,
“ Heaven hath deny'd my ſole regard,
“ Poor William---dead---for ever gone,---
“ Here let me weep and make my moan.”

“ Be merciful, ye Pow’rs above !
“ Profane not them my dearest Child;
“ Your pray’rs to pity yet might move;
“ Then fruitless rave not thus so wild.”
“ Oh mother, mother, pray’rs are vain,
“ Ne’er shall I view my Love again.
“ Heav’n will ne’er propitious hear
“ A wretch beneath its guardian care.”

“ For God’s sake, stop that impious tongue,
“ Have faith in him to give relief;
“ Complaint is folly----ever wrong,
“ And aggravates---not softens grief.”
“ Oh Mother, Mother, faith betrays,
“ No faith again the Dead can raise.
“ Nought can recall the past event,
“ Vain were the wish---as vain th’ attempt.”

“ How know you, child, but still he strays

“ A faithless wanderer afar ?

“ Faithless he lives, his flight betrays,

“ And you forlorn, no more his care.

“ Then---Oh, despise his perfidy,

“ His plighted faith, all perjury ;

“ Forbear to grieve---forbid your tears,

“ William is false, it now appears.”

“ Oh Mother, Mother, Hope is fled,

“ Nought can recall the past event,

“ Our God's unjust---and William dead ;

“ Sure I was born for punishment.

“ How I abhor and loath the day,

“ The hated fun be far away ;

“ Welcome I grasp the hand of Death,

“ Life I abjure—abjure my Faith.”

“ Father of Heav’n !---O lend thine ear,
“ Snatch from Despair---compose her mind;
“ Her intellects are lost, I fear,
“ Deaf to advice, to reason blind.
“ For future blifs, my child, resign
“ Each worldly wish, nor longer pine
“ At ill-requited love.---I pray
“ Have faith, and Heav’n shall point the way.”

“ Oh, mother ! tell me what is Hell ?
“ Oh tell me what is Heaven too ?
“ William, alas ! I lov’d so well,
“ He false ’twere Hell;---but Heav’n if true :
“ For ever vanish loathed day,
“ To blackest night, my soul away :
“ Love has entirely flown my breast,
“ No longer Hope, a harbour’d guest.”

Thus Leonora in despair,
Her impious complaints did oft repeat ;
She oft' times wept, oft tore her hair,
And oft her snowy bosom beat.
On Death she call'd to give relief ;
The moon and stars beheld her grief,
And silent as they glimmer'd high,
Hush'd to repose, the weary'd eye.

But hark ! what means that crash of noise,
Rattling fierce onward to the gate---
A horse it seems---and hark ! a voice
Proclaims some traveller so late.
Hark ! hark ! the bell---the restless maid,
All panic-struck, forsakes her bed ;
But soon a voice salutes the ear,
Bids Hope resume the place of Fear.

“ Holla ! Holla ! Awake---arife---

“ Lov’d Leonora, dost thou sleep ?

“ William shall greet thy longing eyes,

“ He comes, his sacred vow to keep.”

“ Ah William, you---my soul’s delight,

“ Whence come you at this dead of night ?

“ I hope thou’rt well, and far from harm,

“ Oh speak and quiet my alarm.”

“ At midnight, have I travell’d home,

“ E’en from Bohemia’s distant land;

“ For thee, my dear, in haste I come,

“ To claim thy long-betrothed hand.”

“ For me you come ? then prythee stay ;

“ You would not, William, haste away ;

“ The winds loud howl, and threaten harms,

“ Come warm thee in my longing arms.”

“ Loud hōwl the winds, and tempests roar---

“ I’m call’d by Duty to be gone---

“ My Time is short---I can no more---

“ Haste, mount my horse, and let us on---

“ Let the winds howl o’er hill and dale ;

“ E’re the pale moon-beam’s light shall fail,

“ This night an hundred miles at least

“ We’ll ride---t’ enjoy the nuptial feast.”

“ An hundred miles ! Ah, would you ride ?

“ At midnight too---it cannot be---

“ Here stay and take me for your Bride.”

“ I tell thee, Love, ’tis Fate’s decree.

“ Look round and round—bright shines the Moon,—

“ Hard ride the Dead---we’ll gallop on---

“ Come, come, you must not be afraid,

“ This night we’ll reach our bridal bed.”

- “ Oh, tell me, whither would you go ?
“ Oh, say, where seek this bridal bed ?”
“ Far---far from hence, you’ll quickly know
“ ’Tis quiet---cold---and small indeed—
“ Of six planks only is it made,
“ Start not—my will must be obey’d.
“ Come mount—we must be off in haste,
“ Or disappoint the wedding guest.”

Eager around her William’s waist,
Her arms she threw, and leap’d behind—
Her lily hands the youth embrac’d,
Away they sped—more fleet than wind---
As in full speed, they rattled off,
O’er flints, o’er hillocks, smooth and rough!—
Fire from his Charger’s footsteps broke,
And each broad nostril issu’d smoke.

As link'd around his waist, she rode,
Headlong he flogg'd his foaming Steed—
Like Lightning swift—as Thunder loud,
He scal'd the rock, or skim'd the mead.
“ Bright shines the Moon—fear not,” he cry'd,
“ Hurrah! the Dead like furies ride—
“ My love—thou canst not fear the Dead?
“ Ah, me! how talk'ft thou of the Dead? ”

Now onward as they push'd their way,
A fun'ral check'd their mid career;
Loud toll'd the bell—they chaunt, they pray;
The solemn ceremony's near.
Lo, yonder coffin—see the pall
Upborne by friends—and last of all,
Mourners and priests fill up the scene,
In sad procession o'er the green.

With voice impetuous and bold,
William addrefs'd the drowfy priest---
“ Look up---my lovely bride, behold---
“ Haste wed us here---'tis my request---
“ Come run the marriage ritual through;
“ That done---we'll have fome chaunting too,
“ Then homewards will we hie away,
“ And confummate ere dawn of day.”

Both fong and fervice at an end,
Slowly the corpfè proceeded on,
When William gave his horfe the rein,
In fury fnorting to be gone---
Impetuous forward fprang the fteed,
Now o'er the rock, and now the mead---
His raging hoofs, Fire flafh'd beneath,
And Smoke, his glowing noftrils breathe.

This way and that---and all around,
Each object dancing to the eye---
Spires---castles---rocks, and many a town,
In swift succession glided by.---
“Bright shines the moon---fear not,” he cry’d,
“Hurrah! the Dead like furies ride;---
“My Love, thou dost not fear the Dead?”
“Oh no---but mention not the Dead.”

See there aghast! where gleams the moon,
A group of sprites and elves appear---
In union link’d, they gambol on,
And spread around disastrous fear.---
But fearless William’s Stentor voice,
Cries---“Hither haste—ye air-bred boys---
“Spirits and goblins follow us,
“And dance ye at my wedding thus.”

Like Whirlwinds darting from on high,
The Phantoms hasten to obey ;
More swift than leaves in autumn fly,
They mutter gibberish---and away---
Impetuous William press'd his Steed
Now o'er the rock---and now the mead---
His raging hoofs, Fire flash'd beneath,
And Smoke his glowing nostrils breathe.

In speed, he thus outstripp'd the World,
As o'er the heath-clad hills they flew---
The Moon seem'd from her orbit hurl'd---
Each starry sphere in motion too.---
“ Bright shines the Moon---Fear not,” he cry'd,
“ Hurrah! the Dead like furies ride---
“ My Love! thou can'st not fear the Dead?”
“ Ah, William! wherefore name the Dead.”

“ But hark ! the Cock his Matins sings--
“ Methinks I scent the morning air”---
“ The fand is out---Fate give me wings---
“ ~~Our race is~~ nearly run, my Dear---
“ Away,---like Meteors on we glide---
“ Hurrah ! the Dead like furies ride---
“ The work is done, the Fates have plann’d---
“ Lo, there---the bridal bed at hand.”

A church-yard’s iron Portals near,
T’ admiffion frown’d denial—
But charging on in mad career,
Dauntless he made the trial.---
Fierce was the blow---loud rung the door—
The pond’rous bolts, are bolts no more—
And as the grating hinges turn’d,
Death’s gloomy manfions they difcern’d.

In part obscur'd, the glimm'ring Moon,
Display'd the sad sepulchral fight—
As passing on by many a tomb,
A yawning grave stopp'd short their flight—
“ Ah ha!” cry'd William—“ is it here?”
Clasping the Maid, half dead with fear—
“ Know this—by Heav'n it is decreed,
“ Here we should find our marriage bed.”

Oh horror! how shall I relate
The sequel—marvellous and strange!—
His form so faultless but of late,
Instant assum'd a ghastly change.
Shrunk to a skeleton he seem'd—
His eyes no more with spirit gleam'd.
The death-like frame embrac'd the Maid,
Then sunk to earth, a lifeless Shade.

All flashing Fire and Smoke around,
Th' ætherial Charger snorted high ;---
Then fell in Thunder to the ground,
And sudden vanish'd from the eye.—
Alas! poor Leonora view—
Down—down she fell—expiring too.—
The Sprites descend—around her flutter,
Whilst o'er the mystic rites they mutter.—

By the faint glimpses of the Moon,
They dance around with horrid yell—
She hears a dread terrific groan,
Loud echo from the depths of Hell—
The Fiends with taunts malignant, cry,
“ Thy race is run—prepare to die ;
“ Be ever thus the doom of all ;
“ May horror thus, their Souls appall,

“ Who dare the wrath of Heav’n provoke ;
“ Its just decisions dare arraign---
“ Didst thou to God for favour look,
“ He’d raise thy sinking Soul again.—
“ If in the hour of sad distress,
“ On God thou call’st, thy God shall bless—
“ Shall arm with *patience* to endure,
“ And *Hope’s perspective joys* ensue.”



FINIS.

